

Director of Central Intelligence



Special National Intelligence Estimate

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# The African National Congress of South Africa: Organization, Communist Ties, and Short-Term Prospects

## Key Judgments

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SNIE 73-86W

THE AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS OF  
SOUTH AFRICA: ORGANIZATION, COMMUNIST  
TIES, AND SHORT-TERM PROSPECTS

KEY JUDGMENTS

The full text of this Estimate  
is being published separately  
with regular distribution.

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## SCOPE NOTE

In the past two years, the African National Congress (ANC) of South Africa has emerged both within South Africa and on the international scene as a major actor on the South African scene. Its growing international acceptance seems predicated on the belief that the ANC is a dominant shaper of events inside South Africa. This Estimate seeks to examine the ANC, assess its policies and role in contemporary South Africa, and estimate its growth and influence over the next two years. It will also examine the nature of the ANC's "revolutionary alliance" with the South African Communist Party (SACP) and measure SACP influence and control over the ANC and its policies and activities. ~~(S-NT)~~

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## KEY JUDGMENTS <sup>1</sup>

The international recognition accorded to the African National Congress (ANC) as a spokesman for South African black political aspirations is likely to grow during the next two years, as is its popularity with South African blacks. The ANC's ability to garner widespread support, however, is unlikely to be matched by a commensurate increase in its ability to direct and control events inside South Africa. We believe that the ANC recognizes that its chances for overthrowing the South African Government in the near term are poor and that its greatest short-run strengths lie in its ability to broaden its base of international support and to gain domestic support as South African blacks become more politicized and radicalized. ~~(S NF)~~

In our judgment, the ANC's advocacy of the revolutionary and violent overthrow of the South African Government will continue and likely intensify. The ANC will maintain a pro-Soviet posture and the longstanding alliance between the ANC and the South African Communist Party (SACP) will continue, as will the SACP's considerable influence over and extensive and widespread presence in the ANC's organizational and decisionmaking structures. This influence, however, will remain constrained by non-Communist ANC leaders and fall short of complete domination or control. ~~(S NF)~~

The Soviets calculate that the ANC will be the principal vehicle for change in South Africa and they view the SACP, as well as ANC dependence on Soviet military assistance, as their means of influence within the ANC. The SACP is a protege of the Soviet Communist Party, which funds and guides it. Moscow has treated the ANC as its "natural ally" in the region deserving of financial, political, and military support. The Soviets, however, are somewhat suspicious of the ANC's ideological reliability and are concerned that nationalist elements could be co-opted by Pretoria into some kind of reform program. ~~(S NF)~~

The Soviets are opposed to current Western efforts to promote negotiations because they believe the South African Government is still too strong, Western countries remain influential, and the ANC is not yet

<sup>1</sup> The Director, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State, concurs in this Estimate, but notes that it has not examined how potential changes in US policy or a significant expansion of US relations with black South African organizations might alter the conduct or policies of the ANC. ~~(S NF)~~

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recognized as the only spokesman for South African blacks. Moscow appears convinced that the best way to advance Soviet interests in South Africa is to support the ANC and its campaign of armed struggle. Carefully directed violence, as Moscow sees it, will provoke counteraction and repression by the South African Government, which in turn will contribute to the polarization and politicization of the masses. Violence will disrupt the economy, lead to disinvestment by Western governments, and ultimately promote the collapse of the South African regime. Moscow, however, appears concerned about growing internally generated violence that is not under the control of the ANC and from which rival groups may benefit. ~~(S NF)~~ [redacted]

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The ANC is a small (about 10,000), externally based and bureaucratically complex organization. Transformed by banning and suppression in the 1960s from a legal, internal mass party to an externally based, "vanguard" style liberation movement, the ANC's main components are:

- A military wing (about 5,000 strong), mostly based in Angola.
- A collection of governing bodies located, along with most of the ANC leaders, in London and Lusaka.
- An extensive external network (in about 40 countries, including most major capitals) of ANC offices, which raises funds and garners support, disseminates propaganda, and provides general foreign representation.
- A rather disorganized and small clandestine political and military support infrastructure within South Africa and in neighboring states. ~~(S NF)~~

We see little near-term prospect that the ANC and the South African Government will find common ground to negotiate. Both sides appear ill-disposed to compromise and determined to gird themselves for the long struggle. There remains, however, an outside chance that both sides could agree to talks. Should such talks occur, we believe both sides would enter into them largely for tactical reasons, such as sowing division in the other's camp or fostering the appearance of reasonableness in Western eyes, rather than with the intention of negotiating seriously. ~~(S NF)~~

The ANC is unlikely to fundamentally alter its articulated goals and objectives. The ANC's short-term military goals will continue to be designed to rally black resistance to the government, to intimidate whites and erode their resolve, and to undermine government control of nonwhite areas, while seeking over the longer term to develop an insurgency capable of overthrowing the white government. On the

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political front, the ANC is likely to continue to encourage intensified antigovernment activities by black South Africans and try to increase Pretoria's international isolation by supporting demands for harsh economic sanctions. In an effort to appeal to as broad an audience as possible, the ANC also is likely to maintain its allegiance to its official political manifesto—the 1955 Freedom Charter—that lists moderate socialist and democratic aims. ANC leaders are unlikely to see any political advantage to formulating a more specific vision of a future black majority government. ~~(S-NT)~~

Notwithstanding the fact that the ANC is now the most popular black organization inside South Africa, there is little prospect that the ANC will be able to mount a regime-threatening military campaign during the period of this Estimate. In particular, Pretoria's willingness to strike whenever and wherever it believes necessary against the ANC will hamper its efforts to build the infrastructure needed inside South Africa to sustain an insurgency. ~~(S-NT)~~

ANC military activities during the next two years will probably result in more civilian—especially white—casualties than in the past. Although the older generation leaders may question the political wisdom of risking Western support by such a campaign, we believe pressure from young militants for such actions—including possible attacks on Western business interests—will grow. ~~(S-NT)~~

ANC internal political operations will have very mixed results. Efforts to create a coherent underground political organization have been beset with difficulties and will face continuing constraints. We expect the ANC to participate in and even take control of some of the shadow government organizations springing up in townships where government control has collapsed. Although in competition with other groups, ANC popularity and access to weapons will give it a decided edge. ~~(S-NT)~~

The ANC will continue to try to broaden its appeal to supporters of groups such as the United Democratic Front (UDF) and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). While these groups are not now under—or likely to come under—ANC control or direction, a growing number of internal groups are likely to at least publicly pay homage to the figurehead role of the ANC. In most cases, however, ties between the exiled ANC and internal opposition groups are unlikely to go much beyond rhetorical alliances with their leaderships, and we expect that the ANC will be forced to be content with trying to bypass leaders and appeal to the rank and file. Internal leaders, in our judgment, recognize that closer ties probably are a short-term liability rather than an asset as long as the ANC remains a banned organization.

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Resistance to the ANC from “black consciousness” groups, regionally/tribally based groups like Chief Buthelezi’s Zulu organization Inkatha, and rural-based groups such as the Pretoria-created homeland “governments,” will continue but slowly erode as the ANC makes inroads into their memberships and areas of influence. ~~(S NF)~~

The ANC is likely to have considerably more success mobilizing international opinion in its favor and gaining increased financial, and perhaps military, support. Although we expect that many supporters, and potential supporters, in the West will be troubled by the ANC’s close ties to the Soviet Bloc and the group’s increasing use of indiscriminate attacks, current political trends in South Africa as well as the worldwide focus on Pretoria’s intransigence will work to the ANC’s advantage. ~~(S NF)~~

Increases in support from the wider international community, however, are likely to be offset somewhat by ANC reverses in the region. South Africa almost certainly will increase the cost of supporting the ANC to neighboring countries by repeatedly demonstrating its military and economic dominance. The black ruled nations have few resources for fending off Pretoria, and when pressed will have no choice but to attempt to please Pretoria, if only by temporarily limiting or restricting ANC activities within their borders. ~~(S NF)~~

The SACP, by dint of its long history of support for the ANC and presence therein and its dedicated and ideologically committed leadership, has exercised, and is likely to continue to exercise, considerable influence in the ANC. We see little likelihood that ANC officials—Communist and non-Communist alike—will see any political advantage to fundamentally altering their longstanding and extensive relationship. These ties date to the 1920s, extend through the period of civil disobedience in the 1950s, and were formalized in an alliance in 1969 of the three revolutionary “pillars of the liberation struggle”: the ANC, the SACP, and the SACP-controlled South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU). We estimate that perhaps as much as 25 percent of the ANC’s total membership now belongs to the SACP. ~~(S NF)~~

SACP representation on the ANC’s ruling National Executive Committee (NEC) and other ANC bodies, as well as the ANC’s dependence on the Soviet Bloc, will continue to give SACP members considerable influence over ANC policies. In our judgment, probably more than half the seats on the NEC—11 known and 8 probable SACP members—currently are held by Communists. Known or suspected SACP members, for example, hold such important ANC positions as secretary general, deputy secretary general, intelligence and security director, director of information and publicity, and top slots in the military wing. ~~(S NF)~~

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The SACP and the Soviet Bloc also are likely to continue to have leverage because:

- Thousands of ANC political and military cadres have been trained in the Soviet Bloc or exposed to Marxist-Leninist political education by Communist instructors in ANC camps.
- The SACP has gained entry into black labor through the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU), which is a member of the major international Soviet labor front. This influence is marginal, however, given that SACTU has little influence—and only marginal prospects for gaining influence—in South Africa's burgeoning black labor movement.
- Most ANC literature is printed in East Germany and the two mainline ANC publications as well as the ANC radio program have Soviet Bloc advisers and receive Bloc assistance.
- The Soviet Bloc continues to provide virtually all military assistance received by the ANC. Hundreds of Cuban and East German instructors train ANC military wing recruits in Angola.
- The Soviets also provide limited nonmilitary assistance—such as scholarships to study in Bloc countries—and provide or encourage a wide spectrum of material support through non-Bloc surrogates or fronts. (~~SECRET~~ [redacted])

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Non-Communist leaders of the ANC—most notably ANC President Oliver Tambo—are well aware that SACP members have the potential to gain control of the ANC, and are likely to continue to work successfully to thwart Communist attempts to completely control the ANC. [redacted] indicates that Tambo and other non-Communists, although recognizing the need to maintain good relations with their major benefactor, sometimes resent heavyhanded Soviet and SACP attempts to dictate to the group. (~~SECRET~~ [redacted])

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Among the factors that we believe will continue to limit SACP leverage are:

- A decisionmaking process that operates by way of consensus rather than voting. This has a tendency, in our judgment, to discount the SACP's numerical strength and enhance "old guard" influence.
- The presence of two identifiable black nationalist factions in the ANC—the "old guard" non-Communists and the young militants. The interests of these groups will continue at times to run counter to those of the SACP.

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- Tactical and organizational moves by non-Communist leaders to limit SACP influence. In the past, these have included rules that prohibit all nonofficial contacts between ANC and Soviet officials, and the reported creation of a core Working Committee—composed of non-Communists—to run the ANC on a day-to-day basis. Tambo's position as ANC president also gives him significant input in the SACP appointments of some SACP officials.
- The presence of young black militants—many of whom are in the military wing, and appear increasingly contemptuous of nonblacks, Communists, and the cautious military tactics of the “old guard” leadership.
- The ANC will continue to receive the bulk of its nonmilitary aid from non-Bloc donors.
- Recognition by all parties that the SACP lacks popular support inside South Africa, and that a split would leave the SACP isolated and with little influence inside South Africa.

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There are two sets of key variables that could alter our estimation of ANC prospects. The first would see the release of Nelson Mandela. The South African Government would like to release Nelson Mandela primarily to avoid the repercussions of his dying in jail. However, given the immense domestic and international popularity of Mandela, he poses a real threat to the government and it is unlikely, in our judgment, that he will be released over the next two years. ~~(S NF)~~

A second key variable, somewhat outside the scope of this Estimate, is the pace and scope of South African Government reform. Should political reform be accelerated by the government, ANC relationships with internal organizations would be jeopardized. There are few indications that Pretoria has such an acceleration in mind, however, and recent government crackdowns suggest that the pace of reforms will, if anything, slow. ~~(S NF)~~

During the period of this Estimate, Moscow is likely to continue its present mix of low-cost and low-risk support for the ANC and SACP by supplying arms, advisers, and limited funds, and lending propaganda and diplomatic support. The Soviets probably are confident that in the long run this effort will pay off with a pro-Soviet regime in South Africa. To this end, they likely are encouraged by Pretoria's shift toward greater repression of black dissidents, believing that it further isolates Pretoria, increases the chances of a violent overthrow of the government, and lessens the chances that the ANC will be tempted to backslide and negotiate with the South African Government. ~~(S NF)~~

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The ANC will continue to present a dilemma for the United States. The ANC's tactics of revolutionary violence are not consonant with US policies designed to promote nonviolent change. Most troubling is the SACP's strong position in the ANC leadership and the ANC's pro-Soviet, anti-US posture. These negative factors are not likely to change in the next two years. ~~(S-NT)~~

On the other hand, in the likely context of developments in South Africa over the next two years and beyond—inadequate reforms, increasing black resistance, government suppression—the ANC will strengthen its monopoly on the symbols of liberation and hold a virtual veto over blacks who may claim to speak for the majority. In the absence of significant political reform and negotiations with credible black leaders, and given the likelihood of increasing violence and polarization, it is difficult to see: how the ANC can be divorced from a growing number of internal black opposition groups; the ANC-SACP alliance sundered; its support of revolutionary violence diminished; or Soviet influence reduced. ~~(S-NT)~~

While the release of Nelson Mandela, the unbanning of the ANC, South African Government-ANC negotiations, or accelerated government political reforms all seem unlikely over this period, progress on any of them could alter the estimated course of developments or change the factors in a more favorable direction for US interests. ~~(S-NT)~~

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